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USSR Weekly Review

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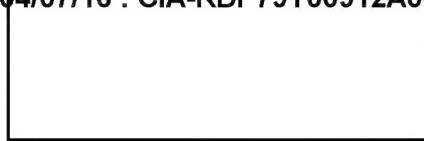
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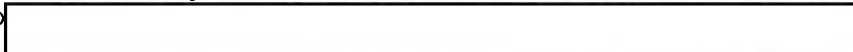
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This publication is prepared by the USSR Division, Office of Regional and Political Analysis, with occasional contributions from other offices within the National Foreign Assessment Center. The views presented are the personal judgments of analysts on significant events or trends in Soviet foreign and domestic affairs. Although the analysis centers on political matters, it discusses politically relevant economic or strategic trends when appropriate. Differences of opinion are sometimes aired to present consumers with a range of analytical views. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles or to



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Sakharov and the USSR Academy of Sciences

The recent attempt by Soviet dissident physicist Andrey Sakharov to visit the United States as the personal guest of AFL-CIO President George Meany has brought to the forefront the dilemma faced by the party leadership over how to handle the thorny Sakharov situation. According to Sakharov, his request for travel to the US was denied because the presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences, citing Sakharov's past involvement in classified research, refused to grant the written character reference required for foreign travel. This is Sakharov's second attempt to obtain a temporary exit visa; his application to travel to Norway two years ago to receive the Nobel Peace Prize was denied on similar grounds.

The role of the Academy of Sciences is one of the most important and often overlooked aspects of the Sakharov case. In the past several years the Academy has played the role of both benefactor and antagonist in Sakharov's battles against the regime. Sakharov's status as an academician, or full member of the Academy, has been a major factor in his relative immunity from serious prosecution. Sakharov's position as an academician makes him unique among the Soviet dissidents and forces the regime to tread carefully in handling his case, for in a sense, the party's campaign against Sakharov is only a small, albeit highly visible, part of a much larger effort to win greater control over the Academy.

Traditional "Protected Species" Status

The 250-year-old Academy of Sciences is one of the few vestiges of independent authority in the Soviet Union. Both before and after the October Revolution, the Academy has been regarded as a bulwark of free thought, free speech, and occasionally independent actions in the face of continual political pressure. The Academy is a prestigious national body whose members can be elected (or expelled) only by secret ballot.

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Currently there are about 250 academicians and approximately 500 corresponding (non-voting) members. All academicians, including Sakharov, enjoy certain privileges, including a guaranteed job plus an additional monthly Academy stipend, a comfortable apartment, access to a chauffeured Academy car, and access to special shops and medical services--all in addition to the prestige associated with membership in one of the nation's most elite organizations. (Although Sakharov was stripped of his security clearance in 1968, he has retained his job in an unclassified laboratory at the Lebedev Physics Institute in Moscow as a senior researcher, the lowest position that can be filled by an academician.)

The Soviet party leadership recognizes that it needs the support of the Academy in transferring scientific research to the nation's military, economic, and industrial sectors. At the same time, the traditional autonomy of the Academy has been a continual irritant to party leaders, and nowhere has this been more evident than in the regime's decade-long campaign against Sakharov. The party's inability to influence internal Academy affairs is never treated openly in the Soviet press, where personal attacks on Sakharov are commonplace. The Kremlin is understandably unwilling to publicize the Academy's rights or to admit publicly that the party cannot expel Sakharov from the Academy's ranks.

Under Academy statutes, election to the Academy is for life; members can only be expelled by their colleagues "if their activity is injurious to the USSR." The procedure for expulsion is the same as for election, requiring a two-thirds vote of the academicians. In the post-Stalin era only two individuals have been expelled from the Academy's ranks. Corresponding member Dmitriy Shepilov and honorary member Vyacheslav Molotov were both formally voted out of the Academy in March 1959, nearly two years after they had been denounced by Khrushchev as members of the "anti-party group" and dismissed from the Presidium and the Central Committee of the CPSU. (Current Academy statutes no longer provide for honorary members, and none has been elected since the Molotov episode.)

The Molotov-Shepilov episode is not a precedent for expelling Sakharov. Both Molotov and Shepilov were more politicians than scientists, belonging to the Academy's

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social sciences section. By going along with the wishes of the party leadership and voting them out of the Academy, the "scientific" academicians probably felt that they were not jeopardizing their own security or going against one of their own. Sakharov, on the other hand, is not a party member, and he was elected to the Academy for his outstanding scientific qualifications. Skipping the customary preceding stage of corresponding membership, he was elected an academician in 1953 at the age of 32, one of the youngest individuals ever to be awarded that honor. Any attempt by the party to force Sakharov's expulsion from the Academy for political reasons would clearly set a dangerous precedent, undermining the status and security of all other members of the Academy and significantly weakening the Academy's autonomy. Such a move would also seriously thwart the party's efforts to increase its support from the Academy's members. Recognizing that it could not obtain the two-thirds vote needed to expel Sakharov, the party has obviously decided not to force the issue as long as Sakharov remains in the Soviet Union. Only after Sakharov has left the USSR, either voluntarily or through forced exile, can the party leaders hope to have him expelled from the Academy.

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In both 1973 and 1975 the party sponsored open Academy letters criticizing Sakharov's dissident activities, but in both cases the letters were signed by less than one-fourth of the academicians--not overwhelming support for a simple letter of criticism, much less a vote for expulsion.

Party Gains in the Academy

Despite its inability to deal to its satisfaction with the Sakharov situation, the party has made significant progress in achieving control over the Academy of Sciences. Through GOSPLAN and the State Committee for Science and Technology, the regime is able to control the Academy's budget and program even if it cannot control all of the Academy's internal or membership affairs.

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In addition, the party has been quite successful in determining the composition of the Academy's ruling body, or presidium, by allowing only party-approved candidates to be nominated to key vacant presidium posts in recent years. The current Academy president, 74-year-old Anatoli Aleksandrov, was clearly a party-backed compromise choice for that post when he was elected in November 1975. The elderly Aleksandrov is a capable scientist and administrator, but he is not a dynamic, independent leader who could vigorously oppose party decisions regarding the Academy.

By controlling the Academy presidium, the party leadership can effectively control most of the Academy's activities as an organization, if not the activities of its individual members. The denial of the required character reference for Sakharov's temporary exit visa, is an example of the regime's ability to direct the decisions of the Academy leadership. A similar example occurred during the Academy's jubilee meeting on 15-16 November 1977, when Sakharov was physically prevented from addressing the session. At that same meeting, the presidium of the Academy presented Leonid Brezhnev with the Karl Marx Gold Medal--the Academy's highest award in the field of the social sciences.

In addition to its success in winning control of the Academy presidium, the party has made some quiet inroads into the rank and file of the Academy. This has been accomplished primarily through attempting to ensure that only politically reliable candidates are nominated for Academy membership by the presidium or by the Academy's subordinate research institutes. Also, over the past 10 years the government has exercised its authority to increase the total membership in the Academy by adding 30 new academician slots and over 100 new slots for corresponding members. This move was undoubtedly taken to make room for new, politically favored candidates who would otherwise never have been elected. These tactics have paid handsome dividends for the party, as the percentage of party membership among both academicians and corresponding members has increased from about 50 percent and 60 percent respectively in 1966 to approximately 80 percent and 70 percent today.

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The clearest example of the party's ability to staff the Academy with its own candidates was the election of party historian Sergey Trapeznikov as a corresponding member in December 1976. The Academy had repeatedly denied him membership in nearly every election since 1966. Trapeznikov is a Brezhnev protege and party ideologue of known hard-line views; he has been publicly described by Sakharov as "one of the most influential representatives of neo-Stalinism."

Many Soviet scientists, including Sakharov, have deplored the practice of shunting real scientific talent aside in favor of political stalwarts. According to both Soviet and Western observers, this has tended to undermine scientific research in the Soviet Union. Several Soviet scientists have confided to their American colleagues that this situation augurs poorly for the integrity of the Academy of Sciences and for Soviet science as a whole.

Sakharov's Choice

Sakharov probably realizes that the protective shield provided by his status as an academician may be beginning to weaken as the party strengthens its hold on the Academy of Sciences. At the moment his situation in the Academy remains secure, but the party's inroads in the Academy will make political dissent a far riskier proposition for younger or less entrenched Academy members.

The timing of the final chapter in Sakharov's struggle against the regime, and against the Academy leadership as well, may well be up to Sakharov himself, should he decide to give up the fight and voluntarily seek a permanent exit visa from the USSR. The regime, however, may prefer to act first and force Sakharov out of the country if it decides that that would be the best way to get Sakharov, and the independent spirit he represents, out of the Academy of Sciences. The party leaders could achieve this goal at any time by either forcing Sakharov to leave the country or by allowing him out on a temporary visa and denying his return. One basic question they must decide is whether a vocal, somewhat controlled Sakharov within the Soviet Union is preferable to a vocal, independent Sakharov in the West.

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It may also be that the officially stated national security reason for denying Sakharov's recent visa applications is more than just an excuse. Although Sakharov has not had personal access to classified information for nearly 10 years, the Soviet authorities undoubtedly recognize that he has a tremendous amount of personal knowledge about the technical, organizational, and procedural aspects of the Soviet classified nuclear weapons program--knowledge that the Kremlin would be reluctant to have fall into Western hands. These security reservations, however, are diminished considerably with each passing year, and this excuse for detaining Sakharov could probably be reversed overnight should the authorities decide it would be in the national interest to have Sakharov out of the country.

For the present, Sakharov within the Soviet Union represents not only a blot on the Soviet human rights image but also an irritating reminder to the Soviet leaders that they do not have complete control over the prestigious Academy.

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